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The Power of Reconciliation in the Face of a Dilemma: Lessons From Business, War and Nature

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Imagine yourself facing a dilemma. Easy. You have just been asked to arrange an important conference, which requires immense amounts of advance planning. Your boss has hinted that if the meeting were to be a success, you would be promoted. You are expected to put in long hours together with the others working on the project. However, the wedding of one of your closest friends is a day before the conference. This also requires a great deal of preparation as you agreed to be in the wedding party. What do you do?

Ah, we read your mind: which one to choose, the wedding or the job? Now try another dilemma. Put yourself in the position of a leader of one of the major powers. In the current political and cultural climate, do you set out to annihilate terrorists or address the roots of the problem? We criticise our leaders, but being in their shoes is not easy; interests, opinions, goals and even visions of an ideal approach to a particular problem vary a great deal. The issues that one faces can be, at times, almost contradictory and take the form of fundamental dilemmas.

We face dilemmas every day. We think we must choose between one of the two alternatives, or propositions, that classically constitute a dilemma. We must fight for our position, because "we know we are right." Have you ever been in the situation where two sets of people argue across the table, both defending their point of view? And what is the result? It is too often a poor compromise, where both parties end up losing. It is our belief that there is a much better way to deal with such conflicts; and yet, we are not talking about compromise.

We argue that many individuals do not understand that seemingly opposed objectives, or values, are often reconcilable. Many choices we make are not "either - or" but should be seen in the style of "both - and - through;" especially, if we aim to achieve meaningful output. At this point, some of our readers might argue that opposites cannot exist at the same time. Those of you familiar with the works of Aristotle may recall his "law of non-contradiction," in which he claims that every characteristic must be "A" or "not - A." We argue that this is not always the case; the two values can exist simultaneously.

American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald (1936) once said that the test of a first rate intelligence is to hold two opposed ideas in your mind at the same time and still retain your capacity to function. Just think about the dichotomy of risk and caution. Risk has a negative tone to it, and we intuitively think that it is to be avoided. But without risk, there would be no progress, no friendship, no love nor profit. So does that mean that one cannot be cautious while taking risks? No. We are simply at different levels of abstraction. This means that not even good and evil or love and hate are exclusive choices. A person can be good in nature but at the same time behave badly as a result of imprudence or obliviousness. You love your partner or child but hate some of the things they do.

In this article we aim to demonstrate why human beings must not blindly fasten themselves on to one of the two (seemingly) opposing values in conflicting situations. The parallel we can draw between the topics of war, business, nature, and ultimately facilitation, is that many man - made catastrophes are often the aftermath of an organization (or even an individual), nation, or culture, torn apart by an internal conflict of values. Disasters can often be avoided when diverse approaches, values and issues are reconciled. This is not an easy task. The benefits of reconciliation, however, have the potential to be enormous. In fact, the capacity to synthesise diverse approaches, we suggest, is what good leadership, as well as good facilitation, is all about.

War and Peace

We are not seeking the Holy Grail - and we do not claim to have the formula for world peace. As dilemma theory strategists, we primarily view the current political situation and the recent war in the Middle East as a clash between opposing values. The problem does not, however, lie in the values themselves. Rather, it is the single - minded pursuit of one value in isolation, or more problematically, the pursuit of one value to the intended defiance of another. Let us look at the following dilemma frequently noted in the press as "Islam versus the West."

Neither Islamic nor Western beliefs are intrinsically opposed or "evil." The problem is that some individuals have taken their beliefs to an extreme. Osama bin Laden appears to have pushed Islamic beliefs to the extreme when he called upon all the Muslims of the world to declare war on all Christians and Jews. To further his cause, he labelled the entire Western world as "crusaders" who formed a "Christian alliance" (*The Economist* 2001a). Saddam Hussein acted similarly when he explicitly invoked an Islamic appeal to gain support during the Gulf Wars. In short, both of these individuals pushed a value to an extreme, potentially causing faith to be transformed into fanaticism or violence for political gain.

Similarly, the Western world has sometimes taken its values to an extreme. After the attacks on the Twin Towers, several mainstream publications reported how some politicians and commentators had expressed the opinion that Western civilisation not only differs radically from, but is superior to, that of Islam (*The Economist* 2001b). In his oft - cited essay *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington (1993) claimed that the Western world has tactfully used the phrase "the world community" to give global legitimacy to those actions reflecting the interests of several Western powers. Moreover, others claim that they have almost unilaterally used international institutions, military power and economic strength to protect their interests, maintain their dominance and promote their political and economical values.

Let us revisit the dilemma posed earlier. By eradicating the "enemy," is one addressing the root of the problem or merely postponing it, only to have it appear later? If one chooses to eliminate or eradicate the "enemy," one could expect to generate further "enemies." If the latter is selected, one could lose voter support, allowing terrorism to flourish. While agreeing that terrorists should be punished swiftly and severely, many also believe that more resources should be expended towards addressing the roots of the problem.

It is generally acknowledged that poverty, economic exploitation, and religious or political repression may provide a fertile breeding ground for terrorism. Hence, just by attacking the terrorists without doing anything about poverty and addressing issues such as clean drinking water and basic education will mean that the real and perceived gaps between the less - developed and more developed world will only increase. This may create more anger among those who feel left behind, and potentially, more terrorists.

In contrast, to reduce football (soccer) hooliganism, football's equivalent of terrorism, the UK adopted a multi - pronged approach. Besides identifying and targeting the suspected trouble - makers, the UK government also invested heavily in rejuvenating run - down areas that were the homes of these hooligans and also upgraded the football stadiums to make them safer and more modern. Some hooliganism remains, but is largely confined to manifestations of "gang" behaviour and / or extreme nationalism. The long - term issue is whether the developed nations will continue to just talent - scout and import "footballers" from the third world or whether they will attempt to make the third world a better place to play and enjoy the game.

Rather than spending a significant amount of Western money on security and anti - terrorism measures, why can't the bulk of it be targeted to help oppressed people in relevant nations, through expanding trade opportunities or increasing humanitarian aid and promoting human rights? The West's over - reliance on military power is likely to

strengthen anti - Western political forces and invite further use of the weapons of the politically / militarily weak: bombing and hostage - taking.

We suggest that the *different* values of Islam and the Western world can be reconciled, so that both would understand each other better. How can we claim this? A year ago, in his speech delivered to religious leaders of America, President Khatami of Iran called for peace and security while reminding that in the holy *Koran*, human beings are invited to join their efforts in *ta'awun*, or solidarity, which can be translated into cooperation to "do good" (*The Economist*, 2001c).

Long before the atrocities of September 11, we had the pleasure to interview Martti Ahtisaari, then President of Finland, and one of his ethics advisors. Ahtisaari, an internationally renowned politician and facilitator, suggested that:

drawing borders as part of a permanent solution is important, but an even more essential precondition for real security is to be able to cross them. [D]uring the worst period of the Cold War . . . security did not mean erecting fences, but rather opening doors (Ahtisaari, 2000).

Ahtisaari's team also took the view that absolute "requirements" of religions and cultures often lead to unhealthy competition, vicious circles, and crises. Hence they promoted the complementarity of different religions and cultures as the only way forward in the quest for a more harmonious world.

The need for reconciliation is well justified. As Huntington (1993) writes:

Non - Western civilizations have attempted to become modern [and] will continue to attempt to acquire wealth, technology, skills, machines and weapons that are part of being modern. They will also attempt to reconcile this modernity with their traditional culture and values (p. 49).

The Western world, on the other hand, must "develop a more profound understanding of basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations and the ways in which people in those civilizations see their interests" (Huntington, 1993, p. 49).

War of the Other Worlds

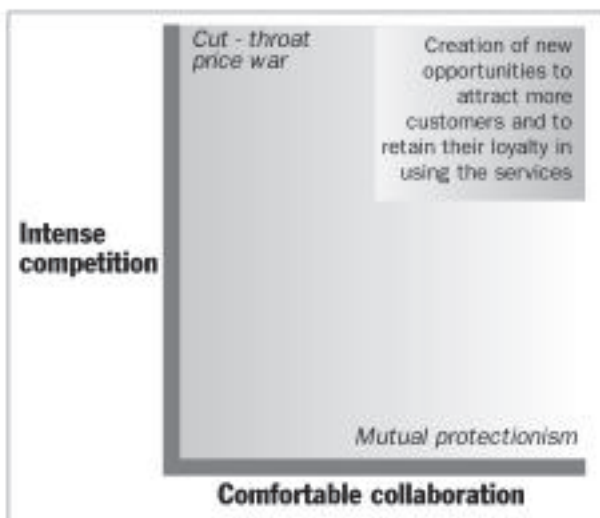
Naturally, dilemmas exist everywhere, not least in the field of management and business. So far, we have underscored the vital need to reconcile opposing values without explaining the process. Here we demonstrate the process with the following dilemma:

Competition versus Collaboration

In their book titled *Co - opetition*, Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996) suggest that wealth (or growth / progress) can be generated not only by working with what they termed "complementors" (e.g. tyre - makers for car manufacturers) but also competitors.

This means that cooperating with competitors and competing with collaborators is not only a possibility but also a viable strategy. For example, the established American book retailer Barnes and Noble competes directly with its on - line operation that sells books on the Internet.

You may be surprised to learn that your direct competitor can at the same time be your direct complementor. In continental Europe, for example, train services and shuttle flights often directly compete in carrying passengers between major cities. Yet they also collaborate. For instance, in the Netherlands, the Dutch carrier KLM offers its passengers a free train ride with the Dutch Railways on the day or the day before departure, as well as on the day or the day after arrival. The airline believes this will both increase customers' convenience and preserve the environment. This reconciliation can be pictorially displayed as follows:



It is unwise to pursue the extremes – either cutting prices to the point of zero profit or forging an overly comfortable partnership – that would force customers to seek other means of transportation or simply travel less. In the dual axis diagram above, we have depicted these two opposites. The vertical axis stands for competition and the horizontal for cooperation. Customers would be more interested in flying if there was less bother attached to airport commuting, and would gladly take the train for the other parts, if not the remainder, of their journey. As a reconciled result (top right - hand corner), new opportunities are created while the loyalty of customers to both transportation companies is strengthened.

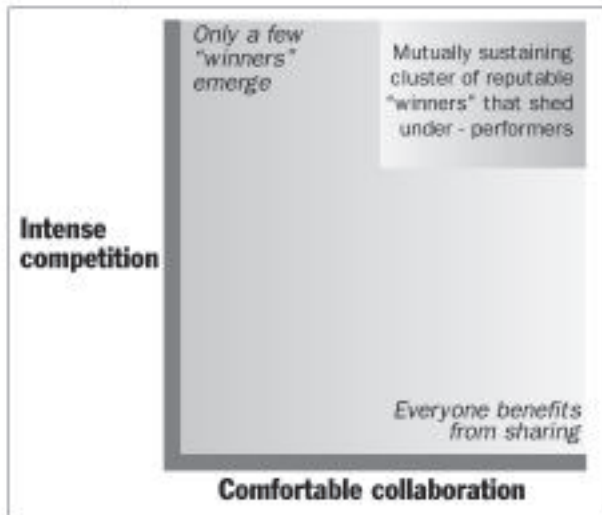
Here is another example of how we can reconcile the dilemma we proposed. In London, shirt - makers have been traditionally concentrated in Jermyn Street. There is virtually no collaboration between them, and the competition is fierce. Indeed, each company focuses on highlighting its unique character and craftsmanship. So what is the benefit of converging

in the same location? The answer: a reputation that all companies can share. This provides more brand enhancement to any one company than it could achieve on its own.

The advantage of a company's location is perhaps best highlighted by one shirt - maker we recently met. We learned that the name Jermyn Street is very meaningful to the customers, especially those abroad, where a picture of its Jermyn Street store in the mail - order catalogue is just like having a store in their home country!

The same reasoning is also applicable in many other instances. For example, what struck us when visiting the headquarters of CISV International, the non - profit organization responsible for this publication, was the office building, which is totally dedicated to non - profit organizations. It would be interesting to investigate whether any of the resident organizations there are collaborating at all, because the fact is that collective benefits to like - minded organizations situated in clusters (think also of Silicon Valley) include attraction of talent, enhancement of reputation, injection of funds, albeit that individually the organizations can be competing for their share of limited resources. Non - profit exchange organizations, such as CISV, which has a "niche market" with its unique programmes for under 16 year olds, could perhaps cooperate quite comfortably with other exchange groups that only accept participants above the age of 16, thus forming a symbiosis.

We can depict the reconciliation for this as follows:



Reputation created collectively enhanced individual brands and attracted new resources. Strengthened individual brands and fresh resources further boost reputation, which, in turn, attracts new resources. However, because companies are competing against each other (i.e. for customers on Jermyn Street, and talent and investment in Silicon Valley), those who are unsuccessful with their products (or services) are unlikely to survive. With under - performers

expelled, the reputation of the cluster further improves. Note how we have again demonstrated this on a dual axis diagram where the vertical axis stands for competition, the horizontal for cooperation. Our proposed reconciliation is shown in the top right-hand corner.

Now to the Weather Report and Politics

You can also find that dilemmas exist in other aspects of life. For example, in science, chaos theory dictates that instability and stability must co-exist. The weather is a quintessential example. No matter how sophisticated modern technologies are, it is still impossible to answer one question: Can we be sure that it will not rain tomorrow? Dynamic environmental conditions generally deem weather to be unpredictable. In contrast, no matter how unstable the weather is, we rarely see snowstorms in deserts or heat waves in the polar regions. This suggests that instability takes place within a bounded realm of stability. Nature seems to have reconciled instability and stability. But what happens if we disrupt the way of nature? Alarming effects can already be found. One only needs to think of global warming. Experts say that the consequences can be lethal if the Earth's oceanic streams change their courses, even in the slightest way.

Our preferred political system, namely democracy, is a reconciliation of dictatorship and anarchy. In a totalitarian regime, all civil activities are constrained and conform to state-determined policy, doctrine and ideology. At the other end of the spectrum, people in a state that is devoid of a government would find it difficult to pursue common interests and establish common codes. The former Soviet Union and some of the war-torn African countries represent orderly and anarchic states, respectively. Our political system values diversities (in terms of races, creeds, interests, personal abilities), which make creativity and novelty possible. At the same time, all members of the society are constrained by social, legal and ethical rules. We, therefore, question if a political system of total order or anarchy would ever sustain, as the two conditions represent extreme values.

Piecing the Puzzle Together

It was Martin Luther King Jr. (1963), who said that: Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. . . . The chain reaction of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.

We do not want to conclude this article with such a bleak outlook. While it is worth remembering how values, when taken to an extreme, may become destructive and pathological, it is also relevant to note that we would be unable to describe darkness, had we not a picture of its opposite – light – in our minds.

We could not understand nor love someone if we did not know what disliking someone feels like. Opposites are complementary. And more. They are synergistic.

This essay has perhaps presented an unusual perspective to some of the difficult and complex issues that surround us and hopefully shown a different way of perceiving them. It is our firm belief that those individuals who see, and understand, the two or more sides of things; that only together they make perfect sense, are the more successful leaders in this world. Individuals like these "make matters easier" for the rest of us, and "help us to bring about" difficult decisions. Coincidentally, all dictionary definitions on the role of the facilitator are along these very same lines. But how does one reconcile the wedding versus job dilemma? We would prefer to leave it to your own devices. The only guidance we want to offer you is this: be creative while holding the two opposed ideas in your head at the same time. For it is in the dialogue and dynamics between the two ideas, that progress is made. ☛

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